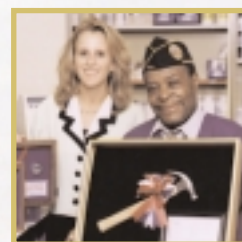




Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

FALL • 2000



Go, Team!

Network pharmacists
receive national recognition

Sleeping Disorders:

What you need to know

Home Tests Can Be Helpful Health Allies

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



Caring About Your Health And More

When was the last time you had a good night's sleep? If it was last night, consider yourself lucky. About 70 million Americans have trouble getting their zzzzs. And besides leaving them feeling drowsy the next day, sleep deprivation can cause stress, sap their immune system and even have a link to heart disease. Turn to page 4 to learn more about sleep disorders and what to do if you're not getting enough shut-eye.

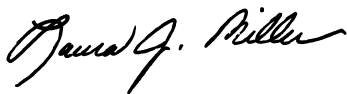
You might also be interested in all those home tests piled high on drugstore shelves.

Can they help you monitor certain medical conditions or point you toward a problem that needs medical care by a VA healthcare professional? In many instances, the answer is yes. But read "Home Tests Can Be Helpful Health Allies" to find out how to make the best use of two commonly used tests.

For some time now, you've been hearing about One VA. To support the One VA mission, we are happy to bring you news about your non-health-related benefits. For example, in this issue you'll learn about the burial benefits provided by the National Cemetery Administration to eligible veterans. You'll also discover why our Network's excellent pharmacy service stands out for its teamwork, dedication and One VA spirit.

As always, we encourage your comments and suggestions. One way you can help us serve you better is by filling out the attached card found in the center of this magazine. Another way is simply by staying on top of your physical and emotional well-being. See your VA healthcare provider for regular checkups and screenings. Keep notes about troubling symptoms. Be open and honest during your medical visits. And practice healthy habits. If you need help, contact your VA healthcare provider for support.

Wishing you a happy, healthy fall!



—Laura Miller
Network Director

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

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Go, Team!

Teamwork helps VISN 10's pharmacy services achieve results—and recognition

Accomplishing meaningful goals that put customers first. Achieving cost savings that can be passed on to all Americans.

Getting back to basics. Cutting through red tape. Many might say those are pretty ambitious goals. Yet VISN 10's Pharmacy Benefits Management (PBM) team met those criteria and more. As a result, the team was recognized with two prestigious honors—Vice President Gore's Hammer Award and the Scissors Award, bestowed by VA Secretary Hershel W. Gober.

The 18-person PBM team, the first of its kind, formed partnerships that saved more than \$8 million dollars while improving the quality of pharmaceutical services to veterans.

First, the team worked with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Medical Advisory Panel, a group of physicians nationwide, to identify the best drugs to treat common medical conditions. Based on their determinations, the team developed standardized medication-prescribing guidelines for VA healthcare providers. Next, with the help of the VHA National Acquisitions Center, they developed cost-cutting contracts with the pharmaceutical companies that manufacture those medications. The result? In plain English, VISN 10 was able to get top medications at an economical price. More important, our veterans have benefited by receiving effective, high-quality medications when they need them.



PHOTO: MARK ARLINGHAUS

Left to right: Angela Rittmeier, VISN 10 PBM Administrative Officer; Joseph Dyson, Volunteer in Pharmacy Service; Elizabeth Stanberry, Pharm. D.; and Michael Sutherland, Pharm. D., are part of the award-winning team.

The PBM team also worked closely with the Consolidated Mail Outpatient Program (CMOP) to streamline delivery of prescription medications to veterans. They also formed a partnership with the Colleges of Pharmacy in Ohio, in which the colleges fund VA pharmacists who train pharmacy students interning at VA medical facilities. **VH**



Bringing The One VA Spirit To Life

VISN 10 pharmacists were also recipients of a second Scissors award.

Why? They pitched in when their services and expertise were desperately needed—by another VISN.

In August 1999, 18 VISN 10 pharmacists spent a hot summer weekend reviewing about 2,000 computerized prescription entries for release to veterans. The pharmacist review is a standard step that ensures patients receive the right medications. Although the VISN 10 pharmacists were familiar with the computer system, it was brand new to neighboring VISN 9. Unfortunately, VISN 9 was also suffering a shortage of pharmacists at that time. As a result, a three-week backlog developed, which meant patients had to wait for their medications. When the VISN 10 pharmacists caught wind of the crisis, they gladly crossed VISN lines, quickly helping to set up a remote computer link between Cincinnati and Lexington, Ky. Their team spirit helped reduce the backlog and sped delivery of medications to VISN 9 veterans.

Sleeping Disorders: What You Need To Know

Are you nodding off at inappropriate times? Do you always feel tired? Are you a loud and frequent snorer? If so, you may be one of the millions of Americans who suffer from a sleep disorder. And besides affecting the quality of your sleep, some of these disorders may affect your heart health.

Nearly 70 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds are believed to suffer from sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, narcolepsy and insomnia, prompting some to call it an epidemic. In fact, sleep experts estimate that about 15 percent of all Americans suffer sufficiently to warrant medical attention. Yet only a small percentage of these are aware of the

nature of their condition and that effective treatment is available.

What is a sleep disorder?

A sleep disorder interferes with your normal pattern of sleep and may cause fatigue, anxiety, depression, inability to concentrate and memory loss. Common disorders are:

Sleep apnea. This disorder is characterized by loud snoring and gasping or choking for breath during sleep due to an obstructed airway. This results in nightly sleep disruption. If untreated, this disorder may cause extreme fatigue and daytime sleepiness. Sleep apnea may also contribute to high blood pressure and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

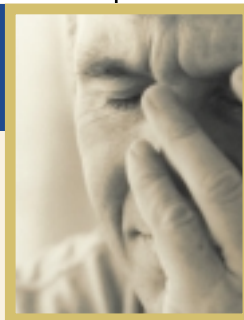
Insomnia. Insomnia is characterized by the persistent inability to fall asleep or stay asleep. Over time, the lack of sound sleep may lead to excessive daytime sleepiness and fatigue. Loss of memory, reduced ability to concentrate, memory loss and more frequent illness may follow.

Narcolepsy. A sufferer of narcolepsy will frequently experience an irresistible urge to sleep. Other symptoms include temporary weakness when excited or surprised, inability to move or talk upon falling asleep or awakening, and

The Signs And Symptoms Of Sleep Apnea

You may suffer from sleep apnea if:

- you have been observed to snore loudly
- you have been observed to stop breathing while sleeping
- you have been observed to choke or gasp for breath during sleep
- you frequently have headaches upon awakening
- you feel tired or sleepy during the day even after an apparent full night's sleep
- you are overweight
- your neck size is larger than 17"
- you feel depressed





order may report aching legs before bedtime or when getting up.


Sleep apnea and your heart

Though the connection is not fully understood, a person with sleep apnea is twice as likely to suffer from high blood pressure and three times as likely to suffer from heart disease than someone in the general population.

In 1997, researchers at the University of Wisconsin confirmed the connection between sleep apnea and high blood pressure. They monitored the blood pressure of 147 volunteers for 24 hours a day. The bad news: The more serious the sleep apnea, the greater the frequency of high blood pressure. The good news: When sufferers of sleep apnea receive proper treatment, they are usually able to sleep more soundly and their blood pressure goes down.

Help is now available

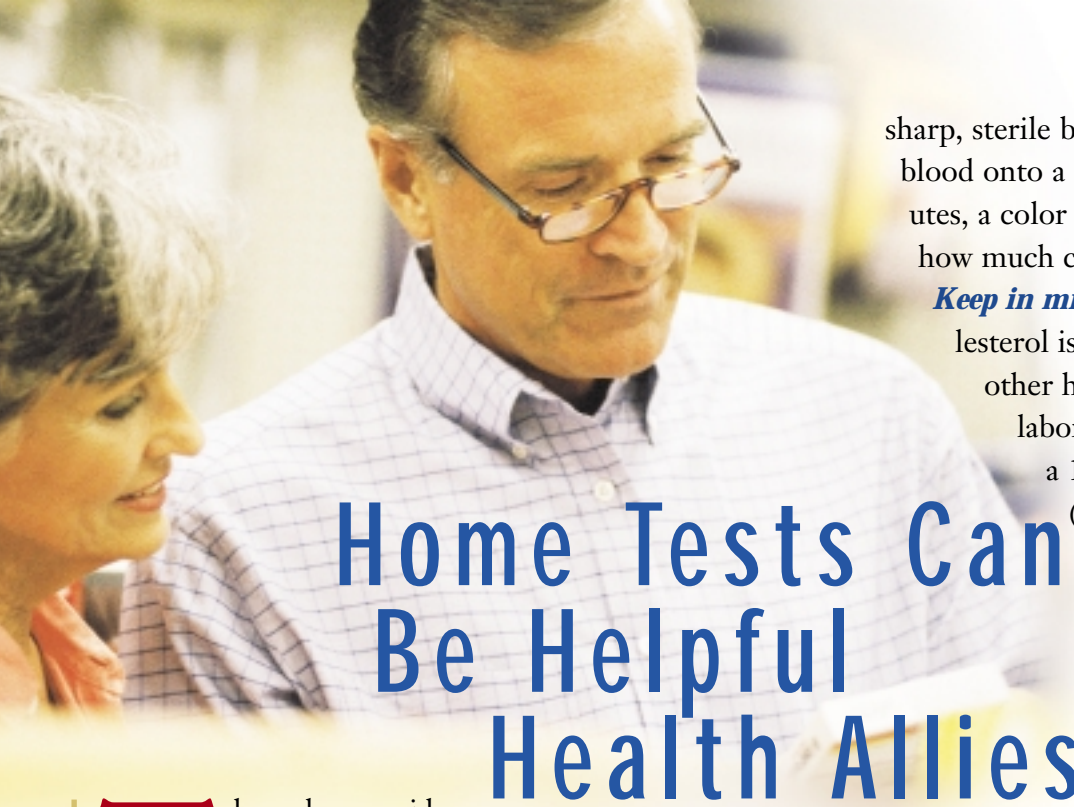
Ninety-five percent of people with sleep disorders don't realize they have a problem. Consequently, their disorders go untreated. However, help is available. Physicians trained in sleep medicine can evaluate you and if necessary recommend treatments to help you sleep better. Such treatments may include behavioral changes (weight loss, smoking cessation, change in sleeping position and better sleep habits), breathing devices (nasal continuous positive airway pressure and dental appliances) and surgery (removal of the adenoids and tonsils and removal of excess throat tissue).

If you're not getting a good night's rest, the steps you take to improve your sleep may also protect your heart and help you enjoy a happier, more productive life. Your first step: Discuss the problem with your VA primary care provider. 

experiencing vivid dreamlike scenes when waking up or falling asleep.

Restless legs syndrome (RLS). RLS is characterized by crawling or tingling sensations in the legs while awake and an irresistible urge to move the legs during rest. Leg movement may cause frequent awakenings and result in excessive daytime sleepiness, an inability to carry out normal duties and feelings of anxiety and depression.

Periodic limb movement disorder. This condition is marked by periodic involuntary contractions of the leg muscles during sleep. The contractions cause jerking movements and frequent partial awakenings. The disrupted sleep results in daytime fatigue despite an apparent full night's rest. People with this dis-



Home Tests Can Be Helpful Health Allies

These days, a wide range of home health tests for diagnosis, screening and monitoring can be found in your neighborhood drugstore. Home health tests can be useful if you think of them as aids to the care you receive from your VA healthcare team. Here's a rundown of two common home health tests, how they work and some things you should keep in mind.

Total cholesterol test

What it does A simple blood test measures the total value of your blood cholesterol.

How it works You prick your finger with a

sharp, sterile blade and place two drops of blood onto a treated strip. After 10 minutes, a color change in the strip tells you how much cholesterol is in the sample.

Keep in mind Knowing your total cholesterol is of limited use. On the other hand, a doctor-supervised laboratory blood test taken after a 12-hour fast analyzes HDL (good) cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglyceride levels. You can have a total cholesterol value of less than 200 (200 being the “normal” mark) and still have an imbalance between LDL

and HDL levels that would require a doctor's care. So if the home test reveals that your total cholesterol is well over 200, you should definitely see your VA healthcare provider.

Stool testing

What it does A fecal occult blood test (FOBT) detects traces of blood in the stool, which may be a sign of hemorrhoids, colitis or colorectal cancer.

How it works You drop a treated pad into the toilet after you have had a bowel movement. If blood is present, the pad changes color within about two minutes.

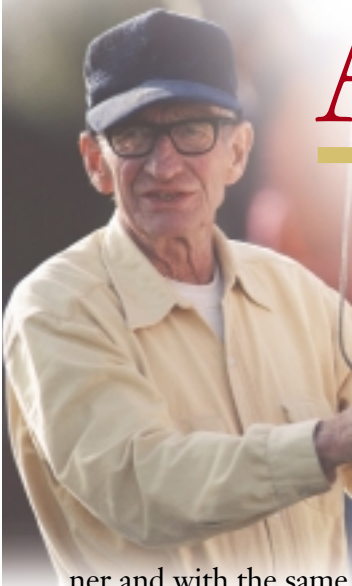
Keep in mind Results can be affected by certain foods you may have eaten (red meat, melon, raw broccoli, cauliflower, radishes or turnips), vitamin C supplements as well as toilet bowl contaminants. Women should not use the test if they are menstruating. Furthermore, the FOBT is just the tip of the screening iceberg. Doctors recommend that everyone over age 50 also have an annual physical digital rectal examination. Additionally, every three to five years, you should have a sigmoidoscopy (inspection of the lower colon) or a colonoscopy (inspection of the entire colon) every 10 years. **VH**

Testing Tips

Whatever the home health test you use, keep these pointers in mind:

- Check expiration dates.
- Follow directions exactly.
- Double-check results with another test done on another day.
- If you are experiencing symptoms or not feeling well, make an appointment with your VA healthcare provider, even if your home results were negative.
- All positive results should be reported to your VA healthcare provider immediately.

VA Burial Benefits: Are You Entitled?



As a veteran, you can help your family get through a trying time by finding out about your VA burial benefits in advance.


Eligible veterans are entitled to free burial in any national cemetery that has space. Cremated remains are buried or interred in the same manner and with the same honors as casketed remains.

Who is eligible?

If you are a veteran who was discharged from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable, you are eligible for burial benefits. With certain exceptions, service beginning after September 7, 1980, as an enlisted person, and service after October 16, 1981, as an officer, must be for a minimum of 24 months or the full period for which you were called to active duty.

In addition, the spouse or unremarried surviving spouse of an eligible veteran is eligible for burial. However, if the surviving spouse remarries an ineligible individual, he or she would lose burial benefits.

Minor children of eligible veterans under age 21 are eligible as are children under age 23 who are pursuing a course of instruction at an approved educational institution. An unmarried adult who was physically or mentally disabled prior to his or her 21st birthday and incapable of self-support may be eligible for burial as well.

For more information about burial benefits, please call your local VA Medical Center and ask for the Details Office. The staff will help you with all of your needs. 

Hepatitis C: What You Should Know About This Growing Health Threat

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a virus that travels through the bloodstream, causing major liver damage in some people. Most people who are infected don't feel sick at all, while others feel quite ill. The degree of liver damage also varies from one person to the next. Some develop severe scarring of the liver called cirrhosis over the course of 15 to 20 years, while others never develop life-threatening complications.

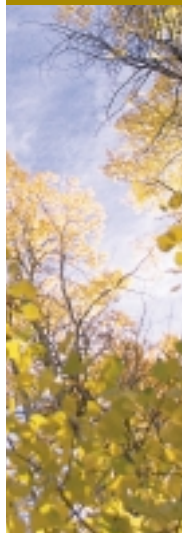


Discuss hepatitis C testing with your VA primary care provider if:

- you have injected illegal drugs even once
- you have ever snorted cocaine even once
- you received a blood transfusion or an organ transplant before 1992
- you are on hemodialysis
- you have had multiple sexual partners
- you have tattoos or multiple body piercings
- you have come in contact with someone else's blood

Early diagnosis of hepatitis C is important so you can be counseled about how to prevent transmission of the disease to others. Early diagnosis also ensures appropriate treatment.

A Good Shot In The Arm



Vaccines provide the best protection against flu and pneumonia. You need a yearly flu shot if you ...

- are age 50 or older
- have asthma
- have kidney, lung or heart disease
- have diabetes
- have a compromised immune system

If you are age 65 or older or have a chronic disease, you should also receive the pneumonia vaccine once every six years. Check with your healthcare provider to find out if you should be immunized.

Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Akron VA Campus

676 South Broadway Street
Akron, OH 44311
330-344-4177

Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark
Bellevue, KY 41073
606-392-3840

Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Columbus VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
606-572-6202

Lancaster VA Campus

1550 Sheridan Drive
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Lima Campus

1220 E. Elm St.
Lima, OH 45804
419-227-9676

Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West
Suite N
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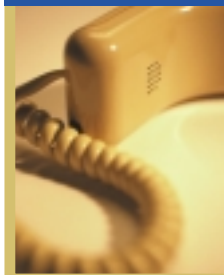
McCafferty VA Campus

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Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Call Tele-Nurse



There's someone on the line 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to serve you. If you have symptoms, questions or need advice about any health problem, call us toll free at **1-888-VET-OHIO (1-888-838-6446)**.

Otis Moss/University Hospital VA Campus

8819 Quincy Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-721-7221

Painesville VA Campus

54 South State Street
Suite 204
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue
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419-625-7350

Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Wade Park VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Zanesville VA Campus

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